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THE HUMAN TORCH
JUDGE DRAKE HELD THE LIFE OF TONY SLOAN, NOTORIOUS GANGSTER CHIEF, IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND! IN ORDER TO KEEP HIS TRUST AS A PUBLIC SERVANT, HE MUST PRONOUNCE THE DEATH SENTENCE! HE MADE HIS CHOICE, THE HARD WAY, AND THE HUMAN TORCH AND HIS PAL TORO, FACED HIM LATER, AND SAW HIM THROUGH TO THE END OF .....
The Sentence: Death!

SUPREME COURT IN GOTHAM AWAITS THE VERDICT . .
GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY! HAVE YOU REACHED A VERDICT?
WE HAVE, YOUR HONOR!
THEN HAND YOUR VERDICT TO THE COURT!
WE FIND THE DEFENDANT, GUILTY OF MURDER!
NO! NO! YOU CAN'T DO THIS! I'LL SUE! SLOAN... I'LL RUN THIS COURT! YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! YOU CAN'T . .
YOU MURDERING SON OF A BITCH! YOU'LL BURN FOR THIS! BURN, I SAY! BURN!
WELL--CUT ME DOWN AND CALL ME MAYOR! I'VE BEEN HANGED!
ABOUT TIME THE COURT GOT SOME MUSCLE! LOOK OUT! HERE COMES THE SHERIFF! HE'LL BE BACK! HE'LL BE BACK! HE'LL BE BACK!
THAT ONE OF THE DEFENDANTS WAS GUILTY AS HELL! I'M GLAD THE JURY FOUND HIM GUILTY! I'M GLAD THE COURT SENTENCED HIM TO DEATH! I'M GLAD THE SHERIFF CARRIED OUT THE SENTENCE! I'M GLAD THE JURY RENDERED A GUILTY VERDICT!
WELL, FINALLY! I'M WITH YOU! I'M GOING TO BURN FOR DANA CLEEK!
THAT DAY WAS LUCKY FOR DANA CLEEK!

IN FACT, I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF THEY'D TRY TO SERVE TONY!
GOSH! I FORGOT! YOU'RE SUBDUED TO GIVE A DEMONSTRATION OF FLAME POWER THIS EVENING? WE'D BETTER HURRY!
BETTER MAKE USE OF THAT POWER, TORCH! WE CAN'T MISS THOSE FIRST POINTS BY HAIR WAITING!
AND SOON . .
HOW FAR IT, TORCH?
ABOUT THIRTY MILES!
MINUTES LATER . .
HEY! WHEN ARE THE TORCH AND TORRO GOING TO GET HERE? HURRY . . . HOT DOG!
Hello Hot Rod!
MEANWHILE, IN THE CITY JAIL WHERE TONY CAN BE HELD FOR SENTENCE . . .
I CAN'T DO A THING, TONY! LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO BURN!
YOU RAT! WHAT AM I PAYING YOU FOR? YOU - - - - BAH! I'LL GET YOU FOR THIS!
HA! HA! I'LL BE LEAVING, YOU BOYS! HAVE A NICE PARTY!

AFTER THE GUARD LEAVES . . .
YOU SHOULDA BEEN AN ACTOR, TONY! WHAT'S UP?
PLENTY! I GOT A PLAN THAT'LL FIX EVERYTHING! DRAKE'S GOT A BOAT! I WANT YOU TO CONTACT THE BOYS! THEY'RE TO SOUTH OF HERE IN COVE "B"- LAST ONE! GET IT?
. . AND SO AT THE WEST CORNER OF THE MAIN YARD . . . .
OKAY-LADY! WE'RE TAKIN' THE KID . . .
STAY UP!
NO! NO! DON'T . . OH!
CRACK!
SECONDS LATER . .
HOW DO WE GET DRAKE FROM WHERE HE'S GOT HIS KID?
TELEPHONE! WE'LL DROP DUKE OFF - HE CAN MAKE THE CALL AND MEET US AT THE DOCK!
THAT BOAT'S A SMART IDEA! NO ONE WILL THINK OF LOOKING FOR US OUT IN THE BAY!
BACK AT WEST POINT . .
I WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT IF I DIDN'T SEE IT!
YES, CAPTAIN! DO WE DON'T HAVE . . YES?
A METEOR FOR THE TORCH, SIR!

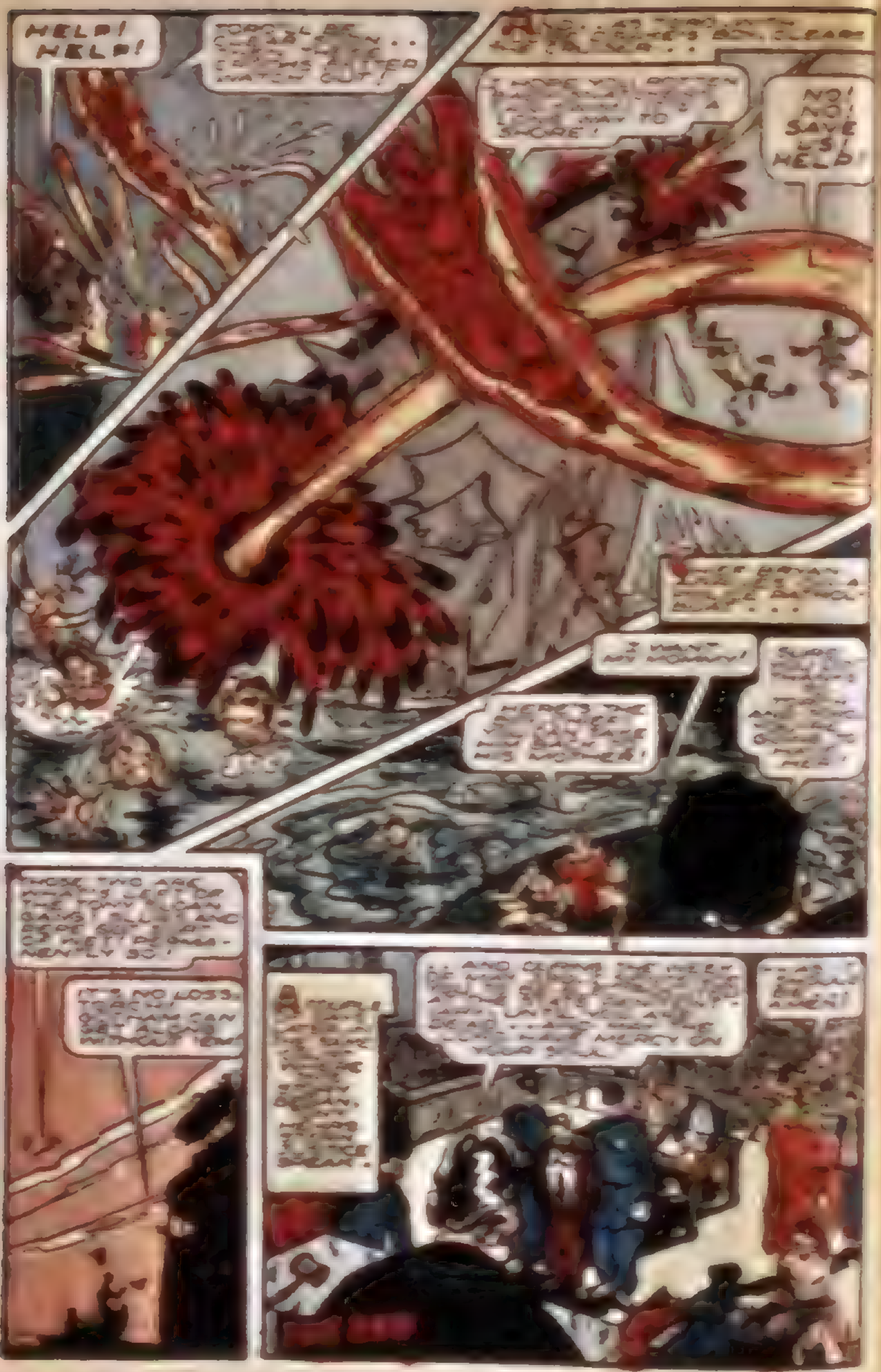
HMM! THIS IS BAD! FLASH THE TORCH DOWN, CAPTAIN!
YES, SIR!
CHIEF BRYAN'S HOLDING THE LINE! TORCH! YOU CAN TAKE THE CALL IN THAT BOOTH!
THANKS, COMMANDER!
SECONDS LATER..
YES, I'VE GOT IT, CHIEF! OOH! THAT'S BAD! HURRY AND IT WILL BE RIGHT DOWN!
TONY SLOAN'S GANG JUST KIDNAPPED THOSE DRAKE'S BOY! THEY'RE TRYING TO FORCE HIM TO LET TONY OFF WITH A LIGHT SENTENCE! WE'VE GOT TO LOCATE THEM!
WHERE DID IT HAPPEN?
AT THE PLAYGROUND IN CENTRAL PARK! FOUR OF THEM RUSHED THE NURSE AND SNATCHED THE KID! SHE'S STILL IN THE HOSPITAL! A FEW MINUTES LATER, DRAKE WAS HANDED OFF BY ONE OF THE GANG AND MARKED WHAT TO DO.

HOW COME THEY DIDN'T HOLD OUT FOR TONY'S FREEDOM?
BECAUSE CRATE DOESN'T HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO FREE TONY! BUT--HE CAN GIVE HIM A PAROLE ON TERM INSTEAD OF THE CHAIR!
YOU MEAN, CRATE IS TENDING TO REFUSE AND HE'S GOT TO DIE?
EXACTLY, BRYAN SAID FLOYD CRATE REFUSED TO BETRAY HIS TRUST TO THE PUBLIC! SO HE'S GOING TO SENTENCE TONY TO THE CHAIR ON THURSDAY! THAT MEANS WE HAVE JUST THREE DAYS TO LOCATE THE BOY!
LATER, CHIEF BRYAN'S OFFICE..
WHEN THE GANG CALLED SLOPE BAGLEY AFTER THE PAROLE WAS DID THEY TELL HIM?
THAT THEY HAD HIS BOY! AND IF HE DON'T RAT ON THE GANG AND GIVE HIM A LIGHT SENTENCE! IF HE AGREED TO TRADE THE KID FOR PETE!
THEN NO WONDER HE DIDN'T WANT TO TALK! BUT--WHERE COULD THEY HAVE HIDDEN THE KID--AND CAR--AND LINE ON THEM?
NO IF--IT'S A TRAP! I'M ABANDONING MY CAR! I'LL TAKE OVER THE CAR IN THE CITY NOW!
HOW WILL THEY KNOW THE KID'S SAFE?
FROM THE GANG'S STANDPOINT, THAT'S EASY! MY MEN HAVE A SET OF THE BOY'S PRINTS, WHICH WE BOT OFF HIS BICYCLE! THEY'LL SEND US A SET OF THEIRS AS SOON AS--

WELL, SAY JUDGE DRAKE A WORD I WANT TO EMPHASIZE TO HIM THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT LETTING ANY OF THIS LEAK OUT TO THE PAPERS!
JUDGE DRAKE'S APARTMENT . . .
. . . SO YOU SEE, JUDGE DRAKE, YOU'VE GOT TO STALL THEM! ONCE TONY'S GANG GETS THE LOOT & YOU'RE GOING TO BE FREE, THEY'LL KILL YOUR BOY!
(GOD) OH NO! NO!
THERE, THERE, MARY! I'LL DO ANYTHING IF YOU SAY SO! PERCH! BY ALL MEANS . . . IS THERE A CHANCE?
THERE'S ALWAYS A CHANCE, JUDGE . . . JUDGE . . . HAVE FAITH!
MY POOR LITTLE BOY! OH, DAN, CAN'T YOU POSSIBLY GIVE OUR SON THE CASE? DON'T YOU SEE, THEY'LL KILL HIM IF — — — (SOB)
I'M SORRY, MARY, I CAN'T! IT'S HARD BUT I CAN'T BE A PARTY TO THE THINGS SOME OF THE CROOKS IN THIS CITY HAVE IN MIND.
BANG! BANG!
IT'S THE PHONE! I'LL GET IT! HELLO! YES? THIS IS THE TORCH . . . . .
CHEESE IT, IT'S THE TORCH!
YOU FOUND THE CAR? WHERE? . . . GOOD! . . . DON'T TOUCH IT! YOU HEAR? YES! I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN!
WHERE'D THEY FIND THE CAR?
ON 2ND FLOOR IN THE REAR OF THE FOURTH STREET GARAGE! WAITING FOR US THERE!

MOMENTS LATER . . .
IT'S THE CAR, ALL RIGHT! WE GOT PRINTS OF DRAKE'S BOY AND ALL OF THE GANG! FROM THE LOOKS OF A CUT HAWSER DOWN BELOW, THEY LEFT HERE BY BOAT!
HAWSER? THAT MEANS A HEAVY BOAT! PROBABLY A CABIN JOB! LOOK! I'VE NOT A PLAN TO LOCATE THE MOB; BUT I'LL NEED YOUR HELP!
YOU'LL GET IT!
OKAY! IT'S A CINCH THEY RENTED THAT BOAT! AND PROBABLY WITHIN THE LAST COUPLE OF DAYS! WITH GAS RATIONING RENTALS ARE SCARCE, SO IT SHOULDN'T BE HARD TO CHECK!
HOURS LATER, AT HEADQUARTERS. CHIEF BRANNAN AND THE DUO GO OVER A SMALL STACK OF REPORTS . . .
I WANT YOUR MEN TO CALL EVERY DRY-DOCK — BOAT DELIVERY — AND MARINA WITHIN TWENTY MILES! GET THE DESCRIPTION OF EVERY BOAT THAT'S RENTED A HEAVY BOAT WITHIN THE LAST WEEK, PLUS THE NAME AND DESCRIPTION OF THE BOAT IT'S ON!
RIGHT!
THE LAST REPORT IS IN, TORCH!
GOOD! I THINK WE'VE FOUND THE BOAT — THE MARY JANE, 43 FOOT CABIN-CRUISER! IT WAS RENTED BY TWO MEN ANSWERING THE DESCRIPTION OF DUKE FRANZ AND FRANKIE KOLE, ONLY THIS MORNING!
THAT MEANS WE GET OUR MAN!
IT DOES! NOW THEY'RE PROBABLY OUT IN THE BAY! NOT BEING SAILORS, THEY WOULDN'T CHANCE THE OPEN SEA! SUPPOSE WE DRIVE THE BAY WITH PATROL BOATS!
AND THEN?
WHEN TORO AND I HAVE LOCATED THE MARY JANE, WE'LL GET THE BOY OFF! THEN YOUR MEN CAN CLOSE IN — BUT NOT BEFORE WE SIGNAL THAT HE'S SAFE! NOW TORO, LET'S YOU AND ME GET STARTED!

SPLASH
HURRY, TORO!
HUH? IT'S A GHOST!


HELP! HELP!
NO! NO! SAVE US! HELP!

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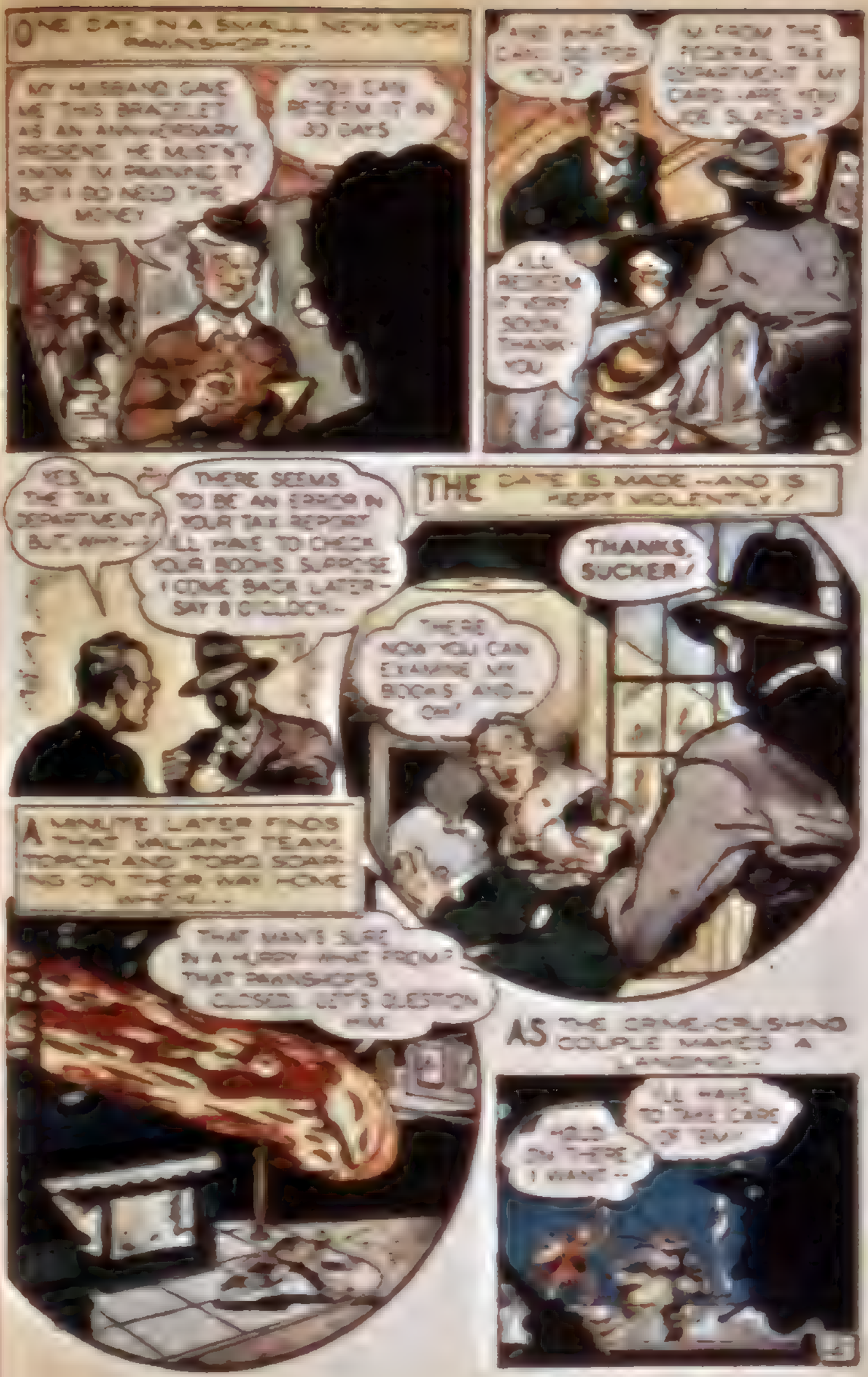
—HUMAN TORCH
IN THE BAFFLING MYSTERY OF THE
PAWNSHOP MURDER!


ONE DAY, IN A SMALL NEW YORK PAWNSHOP ...
MY HUSBAND GAVE ME THIS BRACELET AS AN ANNIVERSARY PRESENT. HE MUSTN'T KNOW I'M PAWNING IT BUT I DO NEED THE MONEY
YOU CAN REDEEM IT IN 30 DAYS
AND WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?
IS FROM THE FEDERAL TAX DEPARTMENT. MY CARD. ARE YOU FOR SLATED?
I'LL REDEEM IT VERY SOON. THANK YOU
YES, THE TAX DEPARTMENT? BUT, WHY—?
THERE SEEMS TO BE AN ERROR IN YOUR TAX REPORT. I'LL HAVE TO CHECK YOUR BOOKS. SUPPOSE I COME BACK LATER— SAY 8 O'CLOCK—
THE DATE IS MADE—AND IS KEPT VIOLENTLY!
THANKS, SUCKER!
THERE NOW YOU CAN EXAMINE MY BOOKS AND— OH!
A MINUTE LATER FINDS THAT VALIANT TEAM, TORCH AND TORRO, SOARING ON THEIR WAY HOME WITH A—
THAT MAN'S SURE IN A HURRY. WHAT FROM? THAT PAWNSHOP'S CLOSED. LET'S QUESTION HIM
AS THE CRIME-CRUSHING COUPLE MAKES A LANDING—
I'LL HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF 'EM!
HOLD ON THERE, I WANT—

A BARE SECOND LATER PUSSY FINGERS WIELD A WEIGHTY WEAPON!
NICE GOING WITH THE CROW-BAR WEASEL
HOP-IN SLIP-WE GOT TO BEAT IT FAST!
IT TAKES ONLY A MINUTE FOR THE STUNNED MAN TO REVIVE-BUT ONLY A MINUTE FOR THE GANGSTER CAR TO ESCAPE IN THE NIGHT
SO! WE MUST FIND THAT ONE!
TOUGH LUCK WE BETTER LOOK INTO THAT PAWN-SHOP AND QUICK!
SOON AFTER THE PAIR EXCHANGES REPORTS WITH THE CHIEF OF THE HOMICIDE BUREA
GOSH! HE'S SHOT TO DEATH AND THE SAFE'S BEEN CLEANED OUT!
MAMA FUNNY THING ABOUT THE SAFE IT WASN'T FORCED-HE MUST'VE OPENED IT WILLINGLY FOR THE GUNMAN-WE'RE GOING TO THE POLICE!
AFTER SHOP AND JEWELRY STORE LOOTED IN THE SAME WAY-AND THE OWNERS KILLED-THIS IS THE THIRD ONE IN TWO WEEKS! AND NO CLUES!
WE THEY HAVE WE BUT--
NEXT MORNING WHILE THE DYNAMIC CRIME CRUSADER HIS TEAM FOLLOWS ITS MISSION--
WE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF THE GET-AWAY CAR IT TOOK ANOTHER LOOK AROUND AND THESE CRIMES WERE COMMITTED WE'VE OTHER PROOF I HAVE SEEN THAT CAR TOO-- AND GOT A LEAD
GOOD HUNTING!
RADIO BOY
SAY! THE RADIO JUST SAID ABOUT THE PAWN-SHOP MURDER

AND MOMENTS AFTER A PHONE CALL...
THEY DON'T HAVE A CLUE TRIGGER
IT'S SAFE TO CASH IN ON THE STUFF TONIGHT SLIP'LL CONTACT THE FENCES - SAY, WHERE IS SLIP? SLIP!
WHILE IN THE NEXT ROOM SLIP USES THE TELEPHONE
SURE BABY I'M CRAZY ABOUT YOU - SO LONG, KITTY - I'LL BE SEEIN YOU SOON
THAT'S WHAT HE THINKS SLIP!
DON'T WORRY, TRIGGER I'LL BRUSH KITTY OFF
TOLD YOU TO DROP KITTY SHE'S NO GOOD FOR YOU YOU GOT A JOB TO DO YOU'RE DOING OUT CASHING THE STUFF FAST - AND NO INTERFERENCE
WATCH YOUR STEP SLIP--
WE DRAW THE CURTAIN OVER THE CRIMESTER TRIO -- AND RETURN TO TORCH AND TORO!
WE'VE QUESTIONED DOZENS OF PEOPLE AND NOT A LEAD LET'S CHECK AGAIN WITH THE POLICE MAYBE THEY'VE TURNED UP SOMETHING!
AS THE FLAME DUO ENTERS HEADQUARTERS A VERY FRANTIC WOMAN IS BESEECHING THE DESK SERGT.!
M'AMSELL HOPKINS I READ IN THE NEWSPAPER STORY I FOUND A BRACELET THERE YESTERDAY AND I DON'T WANT MY HUSBAND TO KNOW IS THERE A CHANCE I'D GET IT BACK?
SO YOU WERE IN THE PAWNSHOP?
WAS THERE ANYONE ELSE THERE?
ONLY THE TAX MAN AND HE WAS GOING TO INSPECT MR SLATER'S BOOKS AT 8 O'CLOCK
TAX MAN? 8 O CLOCK?

GOOD GOSH! THAT'S JUST THE TIME THE CRIME WAS COMMITTED
LA CHECK WITH THE TAX DEPARTMENT AT ONCE! IN WHICH CASE THEY DO SEND A MAN OVER TO THAT ADDRESS
THE
THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH SLATER'S TAX REPORT THEY DIDN'T SEND ANYONE NOW WE KNOW HOW THE ROBBERY WAS DONE
THAT'S WHY SLATER OPENED THE SAFE
I'M DEAD
WE MAY NEED YOU AGAIN WAS WORKING WRITE YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ON THE BACK OF MY CARD
SAY I THINK I DO! IT'S A CHANCE AND MAY INSERT A NEWS PICKED UP DESERVING A SUBSTANTIAL REWARD FOR THE RETURN OF YOUR GREATEST WE QUESTIONS ASKED THESE THIS GANG WILL BITE BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO HELP MRS HOPKINS
WHAT EVER YOU SAY
WHICH WOULD SOMETHING THERE
IN QUICK TIME
DARE IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH
THAT
I WORK IT OUT'S TELL MY ASSISTANT TO BECOME A SLOT FRIEND

AS A SWAGGERING SLIP NEARS THE HOTEL HE HAS A SURPRISE ENCOUNTER
WEASEL!
YEH! SOMEBODY SENT ME WE SAW THE AD ABOUT THE BRACELET THOUGHT YOU MIGHT CROSS US UP!
DON'T WORRY... I'M PLAYING SQUARE SURE I'M OUT TO COLLECT THE REWARD BUT I'M TURNING THE PAIR OVER TO TRIXIE I NEVER HAD ANOTHER THOUGHT!
BETTER NOT— BRING BACK THE DOUGH!
SURE DON'T WORRY
I'M A SUCKER IF I TAKE CROOKS FROM THEM ANY MORE— NOT FOR ME!
SEE YOU LATER!
THE NEXT MINUTE THE CRAFTY GUNMAN MOVES INTO THE LOBBY WHERE KEEN EYES WATCH
HOCH— THAT'S THE MAN WE SAW RUNNING OUT OF THE PAWNSHOP!
THAT'S OUR MAN WE'LL LET HIM SHOW UP COLLECT THE REWARD AND FOLLOW HIM OUT
IN THAT WAY HE'LL LEAD US TO THE GANG HE'S WORKING FOR— MMMM— FUNNY— HE'S HEADED FOR A PHONE BOOTH— I WONDER WHO HE'S GOING TO BE RIGHT UP TO 82
STEPPING INTO THE PHONE BOOTH SLIP MAKES A CALL
HELLO— I'M SITTING THE GANG MEET ME AT THE OLD PLACE I'M GOING UP TO COLLECT THE REWARD NOW
WAIT, SLIP IT MAY BE A TRAP PLAY SAFE MAKE THEM MEET YOU SOMEWHERE ELSE
AND THEN—

ANOTHER
HELLO
YES, THE PARTY
AND IS OFFERING
THE REWARD?
YES— GOT THE
BRACELET
MEET ME AT—
I WILL
BE SO VERY
ANXIOUS
TO RECEIVE
THE
BRACELET
IT HAS SUCH
SENTIMENTAL
VALUE
FOR ME
AT 2:30
MEET LANE
MINUTE IN
HALF AN
HOUR
AND
COME
ALONE!
AT LAST I'VE
GOT THE
BRACELET I'LL
GO RIGHT DOWN
STAIRS AND
TELL TONY
AND THEN I'M
SURE THEY'LL
WANT TO
FOLLOW ME
THERE!
MEMO
MEANWHILE...
YES, DARLING
I'LL DO
EXACTLY
AS WE
DISCUSSED
HAVE BOOKS
WORKING WITH
OUR PLAN
COME ON
LET'S GET
MOVING
—NOW
THE
A
S
T
YES
SIR!
I'M SURE YOU'RE
GOING TO LIKE
YOUR NEW
EMMA
PINKHOUSE
DOWNS
TOWN!
WHY DID
I EVER MARRY
YOU?
THERE
HE GOES
AGAIN!
AS THE QUARRELING COUPLE
HURLS HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS—
I'M HOME
THANKS AT
ME—HE!

SOON THE TRANSACTION GETS UNDER-WAY
IS THIS YOUR BRACELET LADY?
YES. THAT'S IT!
IT'S ALL YOURS AGAIN FOR THE $100. LET'S HAVE THE DOUGH!
I HAVE THE MONEY RIGHT HERE
COME ON, LADY, MAKE IT SNAPPY
THEY'RE CRIMINALS ALL RIGHT... I WONDER HOW SOON TORCH AND TORO WILL COME IN
HERE
LIKE A FLASH WITZ DOES IT...
LOOK, SLIP! DO YOU SEE WHAT IT SAYS?
DON'T WORRY! I'M LOOKING
SO YOU'RE FROM THE POLICE!
AT THE SAME TIME
OH, THAT'S... OH DEAR, IT'S THE CARD I WAS GIVEN TO WRITE MY NAME AND ADDRESS ON... I FORGOT TO RETURN IT
YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET EVERYTHING, LADY!
NO! NO! TORCH! TORO!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY CALLING THEM?

BUT ANOTHER TRAITOR SUDDENLY ACTS!
HA HA YOU ARE WASTIN YOUR BREATH OH--
YOU'VE KILLED HIM!
THAT'S WHAT THE DOUBLE-CROSSER GETS I HAD AN IDEA HE'D TRY A FAST ONE AND GO FOR HIS HOLSTER!
I'M GOING
SHUT UP MITZI!
OH PEACE-MURDERERS ALL OF YOU!
QUIET! YOU'RE GOING OUT NEXT--
WITH A BULLET FAST YOU--THEN WITH--
CORRECTION! YOU'RE NEXT--
TORCH!
ON THE LIST!
WOW!

I'M SO THANKFUL YOU'VE COME!
WE ALMOST DIDN'T.
OH OH, IT'S BETTER GET OUT OF HERE!
THE NEXT MINUTE...
DON'T LEAVE US THE POLICE WILL WANT TO MEET YOU, TOO!
THEY WON'T MEET ME IN BULLET-PROOF VEST SOFTENED UP THE BLOW AND MORE
SUDDENLY...
STAY WHERE YOU ARE ALL OF YOU! OR I'LL KILL THE KID! I'M GETTING OUT!
YOU WIN...
...AND YOU LOSE BECAUSE YOU ARE STEPPING INTO THE ARMS OF THE POLICE RIGHT BEHIND YOU!
LATER. AT THE POLICE STATION...
GET MOVING!
THAT'S THAT TOWLER AND WE'VE A SEL CONFESSED TO STAGING THE ROBBERIES AND MITZI IS ON OUR WANTED LIST FOR AN OLD JOB
I GOT THE BRACELET IT'S GOOD OF YOU TO KEEP THAT PART OUT OF THE PAPERS MY HUSBAND WILL NEVER KNOW...
TORCH IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW ME, HOW DO YOU FIND THE WEST LANE HOUSE?
YES - HOW DID YOU?
IN LOOKING ABOUT MRS HOPKINS' ROOM I FOUND A PAD OF PAPER MRS HOPKINS HAD WRITTEN AN ADDRESS ON THE TOP SHEET, BUT THE...
SHARP PENCIL CARRIED IT'S IMPRESSION DOWN TO THE SECOND SHEET... AND WITH LUCK WE CAN TO THE RESCUE IN TIME
BOY - IF ONLY HAD YOU TWO IN MY OFFICE
THE END!

SHOWDOWN

Two more Wyoming men met on the bottom end of the road there last known as Last Man's Gulch. Now even the storekeepers from either end of town, men who had the guts, and those who sought the honors hidden in the end graves in the west.

In the main street their crowd on the bottom deck, general men, and were moving both. Wendy Jackson was holding back.

"So he drew on me," Wendy said. "He drew like a streak, and he got me out of my holster but I could duck over to my hip. It drew with a right spot."

"Don't complain a man in my opinion spot," shouted one of the listeners. "Look a lot was dark."

There was a ripple of laughter. Most of Wendy Jackson's audience knew his type well. Wendy was a man who did most of his fighting with his mouth. And since handiness was, usually also was danger, had nothing but friendly amusement for a wrestling.

"I dropped behind a rock as he fired," Wendy went on. "The first bullet passed my face down the middle. He never did get to fire a second shot. Just spun around and fell on his face."

"Middle he was looking west," interrupted a suspicious listener.

At this moment, the door to the shop swung open. A dusty man stood there.

"The stage is Quarrelsburg," he gasped. "It's been held up. They killed the driver. Took a shot at me too and left me for dead in the road."

"That stage was carrying money shipments dollars in gold dust. Did you get a look at 'em, Ed?"

"I saw him, all right," Ed managed to say. "I wouldn't forget that face. The man who robbed the stagecoach was Preston Yarnes."

The men were silent. All except Wendy Jackson.

"Well," he said, "seems you gonna get up a posse to run him down?"

"A right good idea, stranger," murmured a tall, grizzled man who wore the five-pointed sheriff's star on his leather jacket. "I'll admit for volunteers."

No one moved. There was just a shuffling of feet.

"It's not that we're scared," explained a wide-eyed little redcap of a man. "But we don't forget what happened to the last posse that went out after Preston Yarnes. They found four of their bodies in different places on the road. Three others of 'em don't even been found yet."

"I'll go, sheriff," said a red-faced, burly man stepping forward from the crowd. "I don't figure on dying forever nohow. Might as well die now as later."

At last two besides the sheriff were gathered. Then someone noted a missing face. After a moment was discovered Wendy Jackson. He was already outside on the street, busied himself his pinto waiting at the hitching rack.

"Come somewhere, Wendy?"

"I was, uh, not going to ride with. What's you, uh, riders been waiting for?" Wendy was for that moment a pale shade of green. The kind hankered to his exchange had vanished over an eighth, but he made a brave show of non-chalance.

On the outskirts of town, the posse came to a halt in the road.

"If I know Yarnes," the sheriff said, "he'll head for River Gap."

"Two trails' close to the whole country," interrupted the red-faced man. "And a wagon: in the first mile he's had our there after a shower. I'll bet my own pass that's where we'll find him."

Wendy Jackson had been curiously quiet for a man with such unnerved gifts. Now he spoke.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said. "You men take the River Gap Road, and I'll ride out the other trail. That way we'll have Yarnes covered two ways."

"Seems to me," someone drawled, "You've figured out a mighty handy way to avoid meeting up with Yarnes."

"Just plain common sense, that's all," Wendy answered, and smiling on the mask, he moved down the trail at a fast canter.

Night was falling swiftly. Shadows crept at the edges of the winding road. The strong aroma of sunflowered rock on mesquite mingled with sweet and somehow comforting cheese. Wendy Jackson's horse gave a frightened whinny. Wendy could have laughed back at nervous apprehension.

When, after an hour's ride, Wendy Jackson

dismounted then he had wondered vaguely if the noise could be heard outside the room, but he did not waste any time in making a decision.

He dismounted from the posse, took his rifle off the rail and crouched out on a wide stretch of sand beneath an embankment. Here he was going to spend the night, in peace and quiet. Let those other fools look for Frontier Terrell. Wendy was not a man who went looking for trouble. No, sir.

Just as Wendy was drawing off the scraps of dried beans on the short embankment above his head brought him to voices, unseen individuals. A rider was passing nearby. Suddenly a voice rang out.

"Put your hands over your head and keep 'em there."

Wendy's hands shot up like semaphores. He waited, trembling, for the sound of the shot that would send a bullet tearing into his back.

The shots came. Four shots, to be exact, so closely spaced they might have been one. Lurid flashes of gunfire illuminated the sky like lightning. Wendy plunged forward on his face and lay still.

So that was what it was like to die, Wendy thought. Strange, he felt no pain. He reached out and touched the sand at his back. Squirming, he looked at the posse, expecting to see blood. He was wrong. He sat up. There was only one possible explanation. The shots he heard had not been aimed at him.

Then his groping hand closed on a hard, metallic object. He pulled it out of the sand where it lay half buried.

The gun was a long barreled, wicked-looking weapon. The mounting was gold, and on the butt there were eleven deep scratches. Near the wide's notch appeared the initials F and T.

"Frontier Terrell," whispered Wendy Jackson to himself. The name stuck in his throat. Then the realization hit him. The rider who passed so near his hiding place had been the gunman himself. Until the shots he heard.

Four shots. That meant there would be dead men lying somewhere on the other side of the embankment. But Wendy Jackson did not intend to check on Terrell's marksmanship. He had a sudden craving for human companionship.

Wendy Jackson went back much faster than he came. The posse was returning with exhaustion when he pulled up before the leather shop in town. A few teenagers were already at their accustomed posts.

Wendy swung down from the posse and looped the halter over the hitching rack.

Then he saw the tall, grayish man who were the sheriff's star on his vest. He was standing in front of the door adjoining the leather shop. A lower fellow with heavy black eyes was beside him. Wendy walked up to them.

"Back so soon?" the sheriff asked, with the hint of a cruel smile.

Wendy hitched his gun belt higher. He spat a stream of tobacco juice between a crack in the wooden sidewalk.

"I met up with Frontier Terrell," he said. He raised his voice a bit higher, and the men standing nearby began to drift over.

Wendy waited the proper interval for dramatic emphasis. "He drew on me," said Wendy. "He drew like a snake, and his gun was out of its holster 'fore I could drop mine to my hip. It drew was a right spot."

"How've been," said the sheriff. "How'd you get out of it?"

"My first shot knocked the gun out of his hand," Wendy explained. "Then my own gun jammed, and the murderer drank back to his horse."

"The so-" the sheriff was about. "But I understood that Frontier Terrell carried two guns. What happened to the other one?"

"Guess he didn't have that one with him." Wendy took the pearl-handled gun out of his belt and covered it with. "But here's the other one! I figured some of you fellows might doubt my word, so I brought it back with me. Guess it's proof enough there's only one other like it in captivity, eh, sheriff?"

"That's right," said the sheriff, and he drew the name on the gun from his own holster. "And here it is. We took it off Frontier Terrell when we captured him two hours ago. He got three of us in a gunfight before I brought him in."

"Brought him in?" asked Wendy Jackson.

"I think you ought to meet each other," said the Sheriff. He motioned the name man to his side. "This here is Frontier Terrell. He's on his way to jail now."

"Howdy," said Terrell.

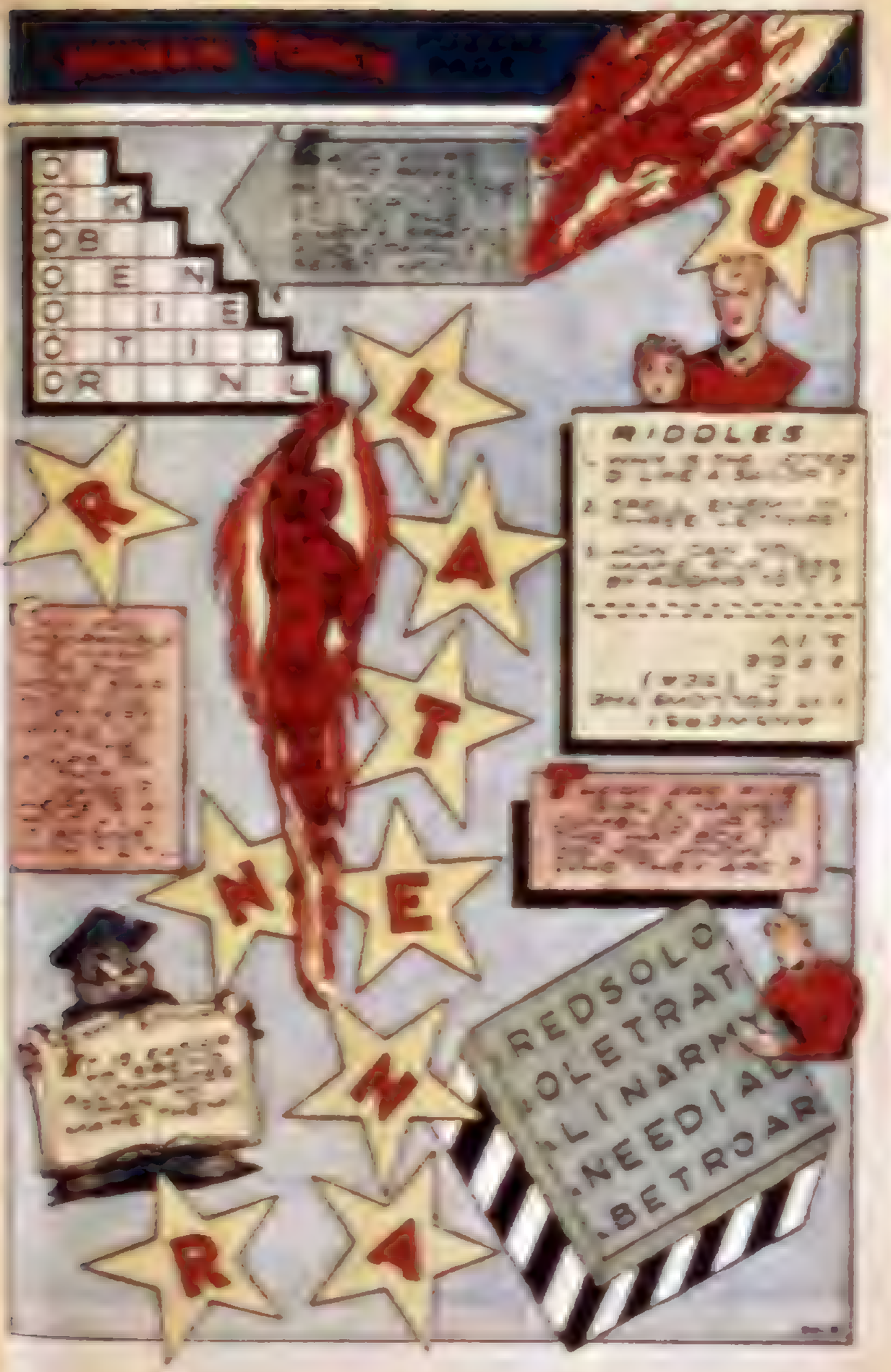
Wendy Jackson didn't answer. With a groan, and little sigh, he crumpled at the sheriff's feet in a dead faint.

The Little Western town still was in the bedlam state of dry and dusty land known as Last Man's Gulch. Here came adventurers from miles around seek or every description. But to this day, no sight has ever been seen of the gunslinger known as Wendy Jackson.

THE END

HUMAN TORCH
"THE FATAL FIFTH BULLET"

THE END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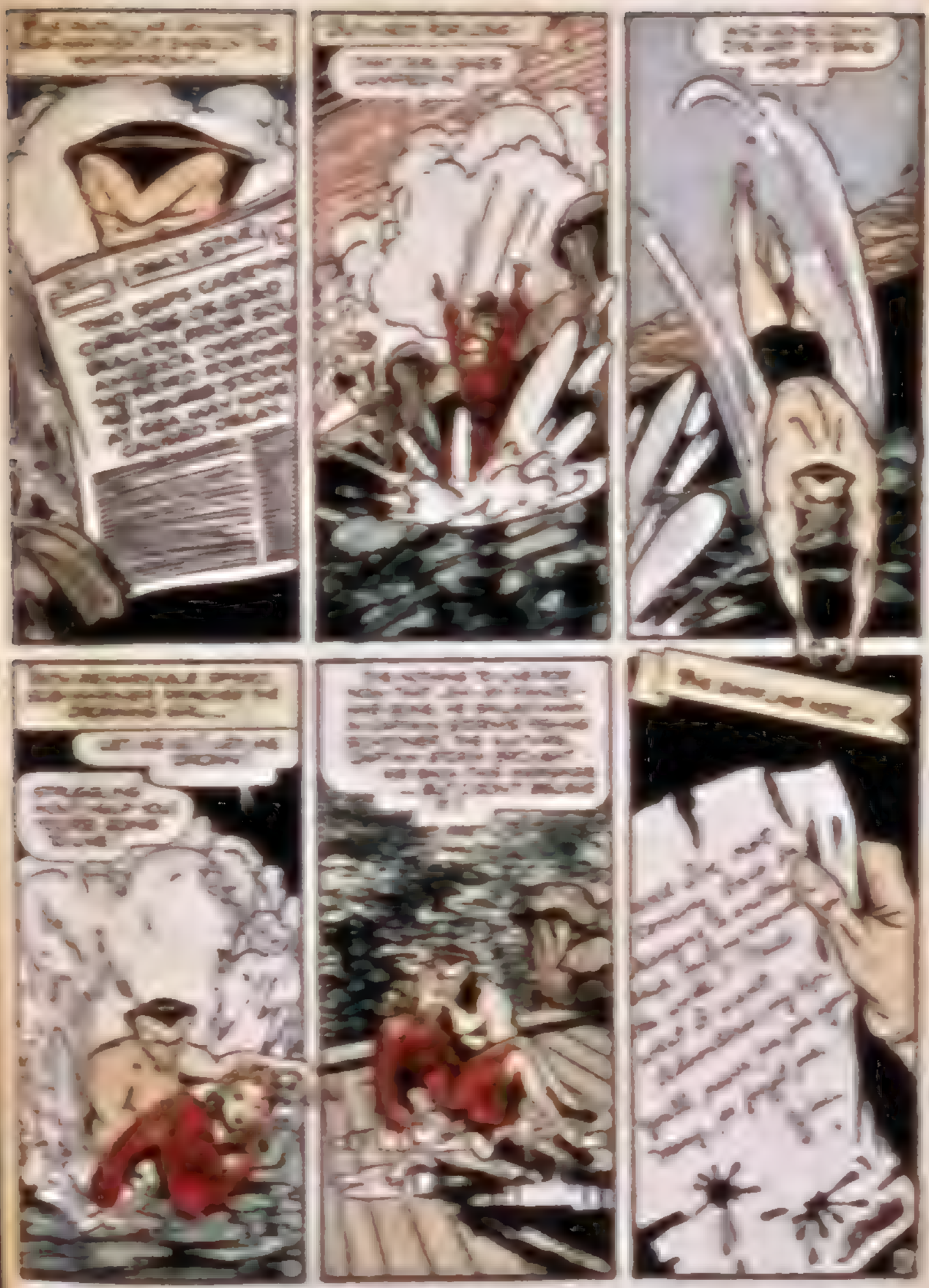

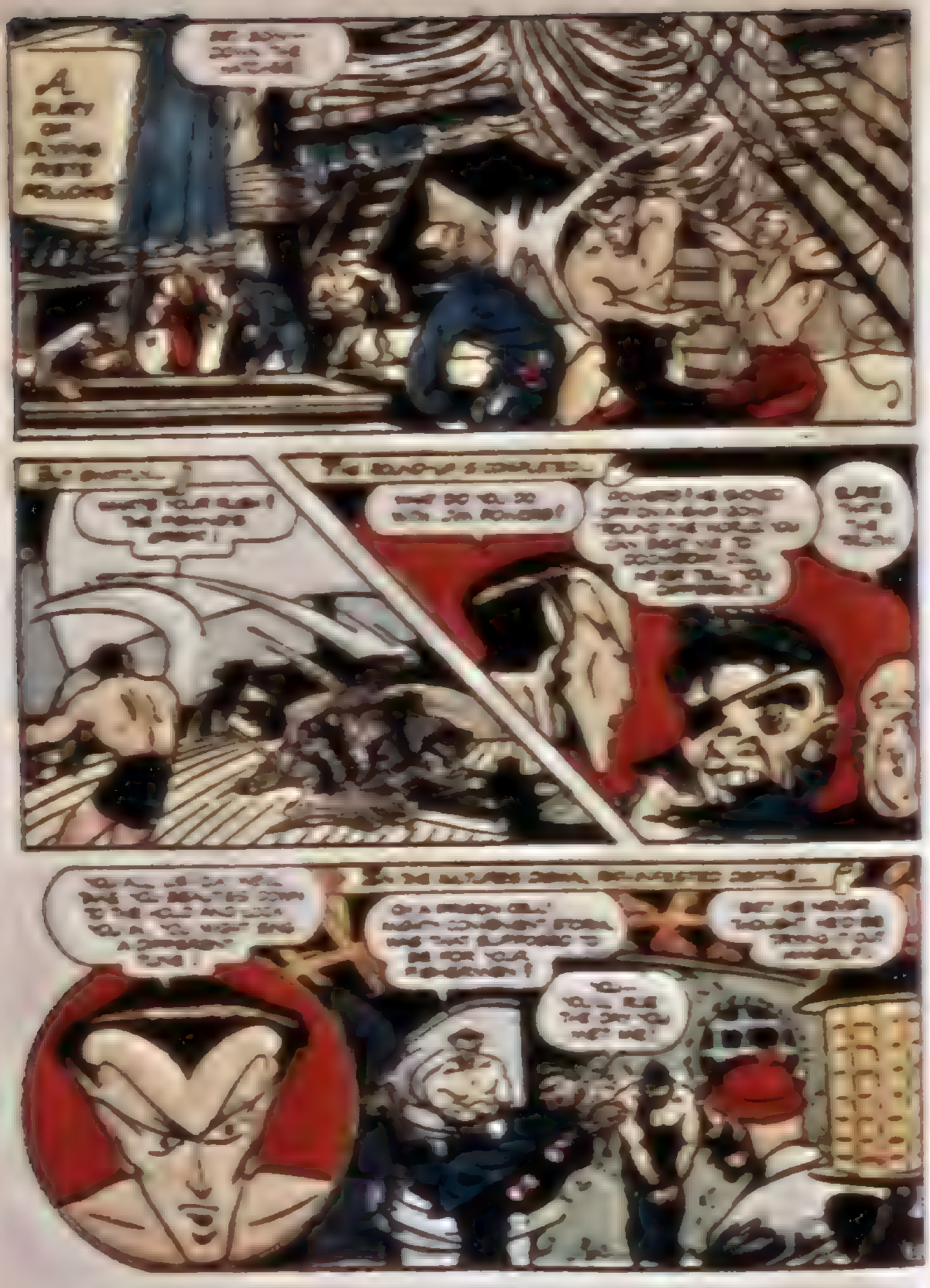

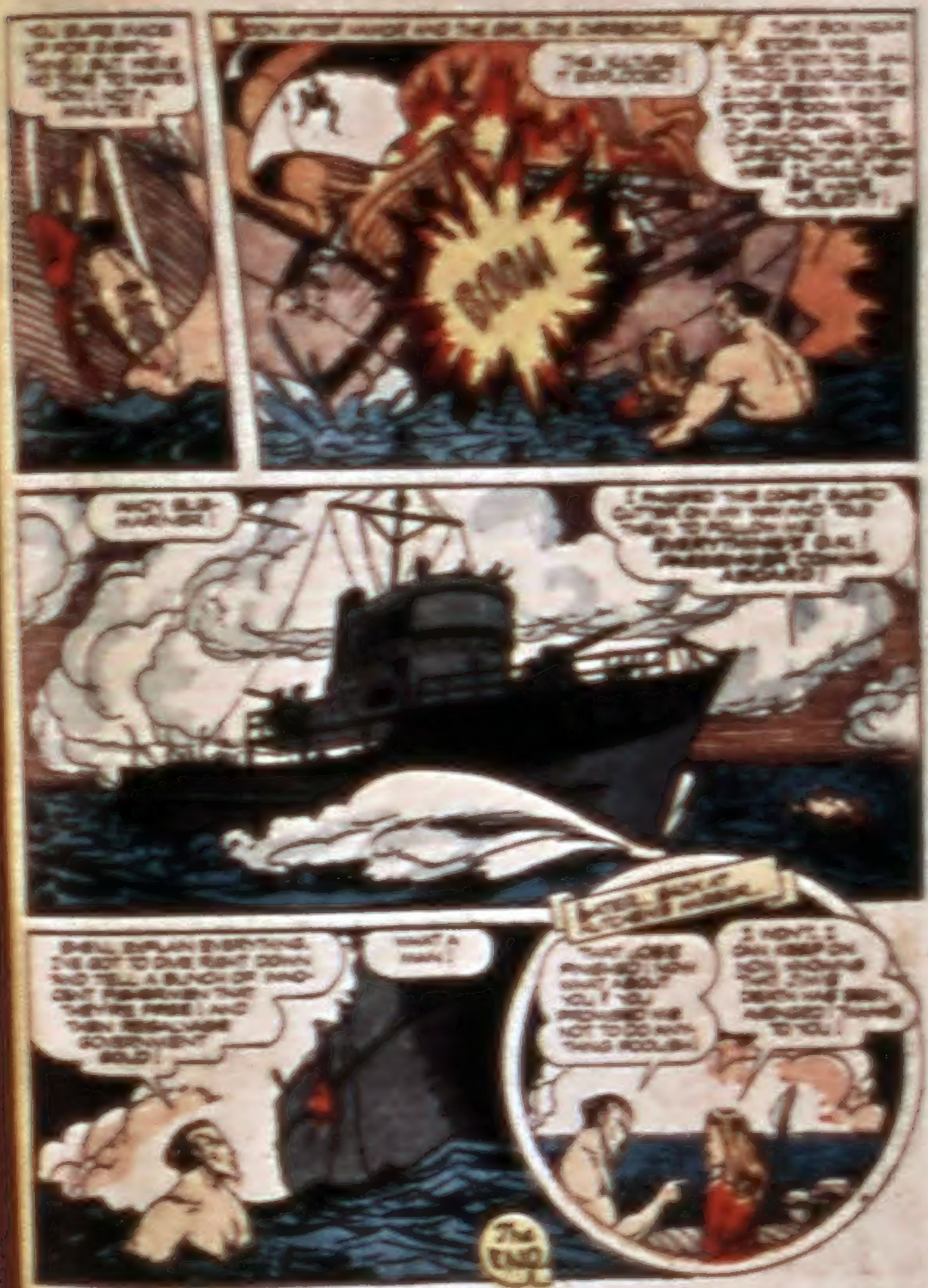
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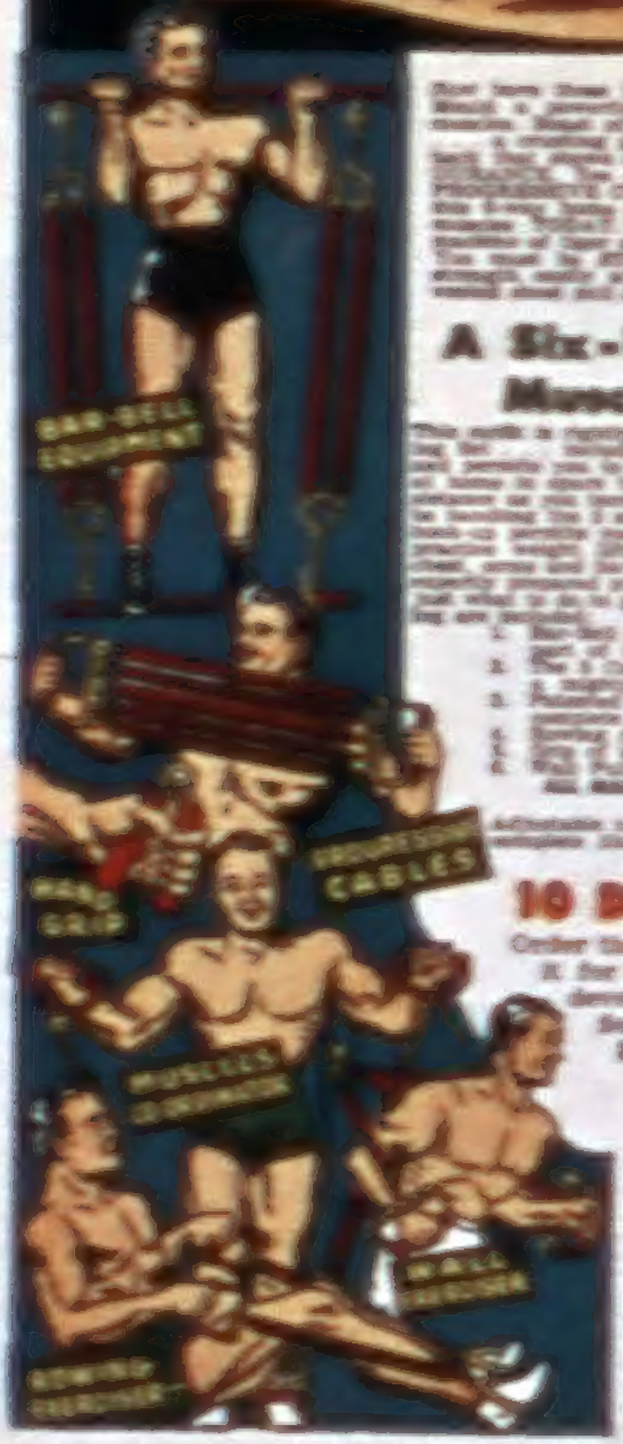

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